

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
-----291819Z 023333 /41

O P 291310Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE 4021
INFO CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK PRIORITY
COMIDEASTFOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAMA 2219

EXDIS - MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE FOR

E.O. 11652 : GDS
TAGS : PFOR, BA, US
SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE NEGOTIATIONS: ANOTHER SWITCH IN
SIGNALS

REF : MANAMA 2206

1. PRIME MINISTER'S COP-OUT ON SEEING ME TO DISCUSS MIDEASTFOR AND
FOREIGN MINISTER'S PERFORMANCE IN HIS STEAD (REFTEL) PROVIDE YET
ANOTHER SWITCH IN SERIES OF YES, NO, AND MAYBE SIGNALS WE HAVE RECEIV
ED
FROM BAHRAINI LEADERS SINCE JUNE 1976 ON QUESTION OF NAVY'S FUTURE
HERE. FOREIGN MINISTER PUT PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE FIRMLY ON
ICE -- DENYING IT EVER EXISTED -- AND MADE HIMSELF FOCAL POINT FOR
ANY
FURTHER DISCUSSIONS. THOUGH HE HAD GRACE ENOUGH TO BE SOMEWHAT ILL
AT EASE IN DISMISSING PRIME MINISTER'S JUNE INITIATIVE AS A MERE
"CHAT," HE WAS EMPHATIC IN ASSERTING THAT HE SPEAKS FOR GOB IN
FOREIGN AFFAIRS. FOREIGN MINISTER, OF COURSE, WAS VULNERABLE TO CHALL
ENGE,
IF NOT TO MOCKERY, FOR HIS AIRY DISMISSAL OF INITIATIVE. HOWEVER,
SINCE IT APPEARED HE HAD AGREEMENT OF MAN WHOSE WORDS HE WAS DISAVOWI
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IN SUCH AN AWKWARD MANNER, I FELT IT WOULD BE UNPRODUCTIVE, THOUGH
PROBABLY PERSONALLY SATISFYING, FOR ME TO TAKE HIM TO TASK. FOREIGN
MINISTER CLEARLY WAS ANNOYED THAT HE HAD BEEN LEFT OUT LAST SUMMER
AND, JUST AS CLEARLY, HE FELT CONFIDENT THAT HE IS NOW VERY MUCH IN
CHARGE OF THIS ISSUE.

2. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF MANEUVERING WITHIN AL-KHALIFA FAMILY INNER CIRCLE IS NIL BUT PRIME MINISTER'S DEC 28 DEFERRAL TO FOREIGN MINISTER INDICATES THAT LATTER HAS SOLD A WAIT AND SEE POSTURE TO HIS COLLEAGUES.

COMBINATION OF OUR TRANSITION TO NEW ADMINISTRATION AND ANY NEGOTIATIONS

NATURAL DESIRE TO SEE IF HE CAN WHAT OTHER SIDE HAS TO OFFER BEFORE COMMITTING HIMSELF PROBABLY MADE HIS ARGUMENTS PERSUASIVE TO PRIME MINISTER AND AMIR. GOB INNER CIRCLE MAY NOW BE IN AGREEMENT THAT BEST TACTIC IS TO WAIT FOR FIRM PROPOSALS FROM NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE YET THAT MEMBERS' BASIC PREFERENCES HAVE CHANGED

AMIR, PRIME MINISTER AND CROWN PRINCE PROBABLY STILL WANT NAVY TO STAY,

IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, PROVIDED USG COMES ACROSS AS SOURCE FOR NEW EQUIPMENT FOR BDF. ON OTHER HAND, FOREIGN MINISTER (AS WELL AS MOST OF CABINET) VERY PROBABLY REMAINS OPPOSED BOTH TO EXPENSIVE ARMS ACQUISITION AND TO ANY FORM OF CONTINUED NAVY PRESENCE.

3. THERE WAS ONE ELEMENT OF FOREIGN MINISTER'S PRESENTATION TO ME WHICH MAY BE REVEALING OF MANEUVERING WITHIN GOB INNER CIRCLE: AT NUMBER OF POINTS -- INCLUDING HIS SUMMING UP -- HE COUPLED HIS DESIRE FOR "NEW FORMULA" WITH NEED AS WELL FOR USG TO BE HELPFUL WITH BDF EXPANSION PLANS. IN PAST FOREIGN MINISTER HAS SHOWN ONLY MINIMAL INTEREST IN POSSIBILITY OF USG ROLE IN BDF EXPANSIONS; HE OFTEN HAS AVOIDED DISCUSSION OF SUBJECT AND DISMISSED IT AS BEING NOT HIS BUSINESS.

FACT THAT HE NOW GIVES IT PLAY, THOUGH CLEARLY SUBORDINATING IT TO HIS NEW FORMULA, COULD INDICATE THAT HE IS BEING ALLOWED TO TAKE OVER MIDEASTFOR TALKS PROVIDED HE WORKS TO GET ARMS FOR DEFENSE MINISTER

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AS WELL AS TO EASE HIS FOREIGN POLICY PROBLEMS. IF THIS IS ACCURATE SPECULATION, THEN FOREIGN MINISTER PROBABLY HAS CONVINCED FAMILY INNER

CIRCLE THAT USG WANTS NAVY HERE BADLY ENOUGH TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR GOB TO GET BOTH ARMS AND GREATLY REDUCED NAVY PROFILE -- THE "NEW FORMULA" -- AND TO MAKE USG WAIT FOR DECISION.

4. IF STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN GOB IS AS I HAVE SPECULATED HERE, THEN WE HAVE SITUATION IN WHICH MIDEASTFOR TALKS WILL BE AIMED AT SECURING BOTH ARMS ASSISTANCE AND A GREATLY REDUCED NAVY PROFILE, AND WILL BE CONDUCTED BY FOREIGN MINISTER WHO HAS NO GREAT ENTHUSIASM EITHER FOR ARMS OR FOR NAVY. WHILE IT IS, OF COURSE, CONCEIVABLE THAT FOREIGN MINISTR CAN NEGOTIATE IN GOOD FAITH TOWARD GOALS WHICH HE DOES NOT FAVOR, IT IS DIFFICULT TO AVOID CONJECTURE THAT HIS ACTUAL EXPECTATION MAY BE THAT USG WILL BE ABLE NEITHER TO MEET BDF'S DESIRES FOR SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT NOR TO COME UP WITH "NEW FORMULA" FOR NAVY ACCEPTABLE TO GOB.

5. WHILE WE NEED NOT PLACE FULL FAITH IN SINCERITY OF FOREIGN MINISTER'S
DESIRE TO RETAIN NAVY UNDER NEW FORMAT, STRESS HE HAS PLACED ON IT AS
SINE QUA NON OF NAVY'S FUTURE HERE MAKES IT IDEA WE WILL HAVE TO
EXPLORE IN DETAIL AT SOME POINT. RESULT OF EXPLORATION MAY WELL BE THAT
FOREIGN MINISTER'S CONCEPT OF "NEW FORMULA" IS LITTLE MORE THAN
GLORIFIED SHIP VISITS. ON OTHER HAND, WE MIGHT FIND THAT FOREIGN
MINISTER AND THOSE OF HIS COLLEAGUES OPPOSED TO MIDEASTFOR IN PRESENT
FORM WOULD BE AMENABLE TO KEEPING NAVY UNDER A FORMULA WHICH WOULD
ELIMINATE "FOREIGN BASE" IMAGE AND YET MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR MIDEASTFOR
TO CARRY OUT ESSENTIALS OF ITS MISSION. POINT IS THAT WE WILL NOT
KNOW WHAT FOREIGN MINISTER'S REAL GOALS ARE UNTIL WE EXPLORE WITH HIM
IN DETAIL POSSIBLE NEW FORMATS FOR MIDEASTFOR'S PRESENCE HERE.
(ADMIRAL CROWE HAS BEEN GIVING CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT TO POSSIBLE
FORMATS AND HE WILL BE SURFACING SOME IDEAS SOON.)

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6. MUCH OF FOREGOING IS NECESSARILY SPECULATIVE AT THIS POINT BUT
IT SEEMS TO BE FIRM INTENTION OF FOREIGN MINISTER THAT GOB WILL
PLAY WAITING GAME UNTIL FEB/MARCH. QUESTION FOR US IS HOW TO PROCEED
UNTIL WE CAN COME UP WITH AN ARMS SALES POLICY FOR BAHRAIN, AS WELL
AS A CLEAR IDEA OF WHETHER ANY MUTUALLY AGREEABLE "NEW FORMULA"
FOR NAVY HERE IS POSSIBLE. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT ANY NEW APPROACH WE
MIGHT MAKE TO SECURE EXTENSION BEFORE JAN 20 WOULD NOT BE RESPONDED
TO BY GOB UNTIL NEW ADMINISTRATION HAD CONFIRMED IT. BEST WE CAN DO

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
-----291819Z 023130 /41

O P 291310Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4022
INFO CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK PRIORITY
COMIDEASTFOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAMA 2219

EXDIS - MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE FOR

E.O. 11652 : GDS

TAGS : PFOR, BA, US

SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE NEGOTIATIONS: ANOTHER SWITCH IN
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OVER NEXT MONTH OR SO WOULD SEEM TO BE TO MOVE AHEAD, ON BASIS SURVEY
TEAM REPORT, TOWARD AGREED USG POSITION ON WHAT ARMS WE COULD AGREE
TO SELL BAHRAIN. ALSO, I SHOULD BEGIN TO EXPLORE INFORMALLY WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER (WE COULD "CHAT" ABOUT IT) JUST WHAT HE
HAS IN MIND AS ACCEPTABLE "NEW FORMULA" FOR NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN.
I WOULD NOT APPROACH HIM ON THIS, HOWEVER, UNTIL WE HAVE SOME IDEAS
OF OUR OWN ABOUT LEVEL TO WHICH MIDEASTFOR FACILITIES AND TIME IN
PORT COULD BE REDUCED AND STILL SUPPORT ITS MISSION. MEANWHILE,
WHILE FOREGOING ACTIVITIES PREPARE US TO TALK SERIOUSLY SOME TIME
AFTER JAN 20, MIDEASTFOR WITHDRAWAL PLANNING ACTIONS WILL HAVE
TO PROCEED ON SCHEDULE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, FORCE & TROOP LEVELS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MANAMA02219
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760475-0290
From: MANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976127/aaaaafsp.tel
Line Count: 192
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 77 MANAMA 2206
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <15 SEP 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MIDDLE EAST FORCE NEGOTIATIONS: ANOTHER SWITCH IN SIGNALS
TAGS: PFOR, BA, US, (CLUVERUIS, WAT T IV), (KHALIFA, MUHAMMAD IBN MUBARAK AL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006